

R E M A R K S

ON

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THE LATE DECISION

OF

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

RESPECTING THE ABOLITION

OF THE

SLAVE TRADE.

By THOMAS GISBORNE, M.A.

L O N D O N :

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1792.

WILLIAM WILBERFORCE, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

YOU will probably be surprised that I should publish any thing, however inconsiderable, on the subject of the Slave Trade, without having previously made you acquainted with my intention; and you will think it particularly unaccountable that you were not informed of my present plan, as many days have not elapsed since we parted. I own that the thought of offering a few remarks to the public occurred to me while I was under your roof; but I was solicitous to be able to say, that these pages have been written altogether without your knowledge, and that without your knowledge they are now inscribed to you. Had you been apprized of their existence previous to a printed copy being put into your hands, it is possible that some one might have imagined that their appearance

DEDICATION.

pearance was directly or indirectly owing to yourself; and I might not have been credited, even though I had affirmed, with as much sincerity as I now do, that you are not in the slightest degree responsible for a single sentiment or for a single expression which they contain. Whatever may prove to be your opinion of the following observations, you will believe that my only reason for committing them to the press is a desire to contribute, as far as a private individual like myself can contribute, to promote the great object which you have in view;

And that I am always,

very affectionately, yours,

Yoxall Lodge,
April 9th, 1792.

THOMAS GISBORNE.

ADVERTISEMENT.

A CHAPTER on Slavery and the Slave Trade having been recently selected from my Treatise on the Principles of Moral Philosophy, and reprinted by itself, and digested into separate heads: I fear that I may be deemed obtrusive and assuming in so speedily requesting the further attention of the reader. I therefore think it incumbent upon me to declare, that the first intelligence I had of that republication was contained in a very flattering letter which I received within these few days from a gentleman of high literary eminence in the University of Oxford, with whom I am not fortunate enough to be personally acquainted; but who, having done me the honor to think, in conjunction with some of his friends, that the dispersion of my former arguments might not be altogether useless, had spontaneously taken upon himself the trouble of thus giving them an extended circulation.

R E M A R K S, &c.

WHEN a subject of great importance is under general discussion, it seems the duty of every man not to shrink from offering his observations upon it to the world, if he conceives that he may chance, in some degree, to counteract a prevailing error by which the judgment of the public is in danger of being misled. On this ground I venture to send abroad the following reflections, suggested by the late decision of the House of Commons respecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade. Having been desirous that, if they were to appear at all, they should appear without loss of time, I have drawn them up in haste; and shall be content if they are founded in truth, and stated with tolerable perspicuity.

The resolution, in which Mr. Wilberforce pressed the House to concur with him, was

in substance, “ that the Slave Trade ought “ to be abolished.” He avowed, in the most energetic terms, his own conviction that, on every principle, not only of humanity, of justice, and of religion, but of sound policy likewise, the Slave Trade ought to be abolished *instantly*. But he explained that any gentlemen, who, though friendly to the abolition, were not disposed to think that it ought immediately to take place, would not be precluded, by voting for the general resolution proposed, from moving, when a bill conformable to that resolution should be introduced, that the Slave Trade should be tolerated for a limited term.

A motion was afterwards made by Mr. Dundas, that the resolution should be amended by inserting the word “ gradually” before the word “ abolished.” And, after a feeble attempt, on the part of those who were hostile to the original resolution and also to the amendment, to reject both by moving to adjourn (a proposition which was negatived by a majority of two hundred and thirty-four to eighty-seven), the insertion of the word “ gradually” was carried, in spite of the most
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powerful opposition of Mr. Pitt and Mr. Fox, who contended for the immediate abolition with the most convincing arguments, and with that earnest and impressive eloquence which shews itself to come from the heart, by a majority of one hundred and ninety-three to one hundred and twenty-five.

This contest having been determined, it remained to decide between those who were friends to abolition, immediate or gradual, and those who were enemies to both, by taking the sense of the House on the amended resolution; and a majority of two hundred and thirty to eighty-five resolved that "the Slave Trade ought to be gradually abolished."

It appears then, that of the three parties into which the House of Commons was divided on the subject of abolishing the Slave Trade, that which supported immediate abolition was the most numerous; that which patronised gradual abolition the next in point of strength; and consequently that which resisted abolition in every shape the weakest. A comparison of the respective

numbers in the several divisions already stated leads to the conclusion, that the first party exceeded one hundred and twenty; the second consisted of somewhat more than one hundred; and the third of about eighty-seven. It is to be observed, that in the second of those divisions, the successful side, amounting to one hundred and ninety-three, contained the united forces of the gradual abolitionists and the anti-abolitionists. For the latter, though adverse to abolition in any form, yet being reduced on that occasion to the alternative of dividing either with the immediate or with the gradual abolitionists, naturally gave the preference to the latter.

Having thus given a summary account of the various motions submitted to the House, and of the several parties engaged in the struggle; I shall, in the next place, briefly enumerate the principal facts respecting the nature and consequences of the Slave Trade, which were openly maintained by the friends of the abolition, and admitted by nearly three fourths of the members present: and I shall afterwards proceed to the chief object of these pages, an examination of the leading arguments

ments on which those who preferred gradual to immediate abolition rested the propriety of their opinion. Collateral remarks will probably suggest themselves during our investigation of the subject.

I. The grounds, on which Mr. Wilberforce and his supporters in Parliament have uniformly pronounced the Abolition of the Slave Trade to be an act of indispensable duty, were allowed to be completely established. It was admitted that this detestable traffic is indebted for its existence to wars, in many instances, excited by Europeans, in many commenced by the natives, for the purpose of procuring slaves: to the depredations perpetrated by the kings of the country on their own subjects, sometimes by seizing unsuspecting individuals, sometimes by breaking up and firing villages in the night, and catching the inhabitants as they fly naked from the flames: to the kidnapping of negroes of every tribe, and of all ranks and occupations, and most commonly by the black traders, occasionally by British captains and seamen: to the perversion of penal justice by the infliction of slavery as the punishment of almost every real crime,

crime, however trifling; more frequently as the punishment of pretended crimes imputed for the very purpose of enslaving the party accused, perhaps even his whole family with him. The miserable condition into which Africa is sunk by the prevalence of such a system of atrocious enormities was equally uncontradicted. The almost total annihilation of private security, of mutual confidence, of domestic comfort; the temptations held out to the darkest passions of the human heart, to malevolence and guile, to cruelty, rancour, and revenge; these, and all the other dreadful effects which the Slave Trade has been charged with producing in that devoted land, were allowed not merely to have been delineated with the sober colouring of truth, but to have been ascribed to their proper source. Even the gentleman who moved the adjournment in order to put an end to all motions for abolition, owned that in his sentiments as to the state of Africa, he differed little from Mr. Wilberforce. Nor was any one found hardy enough to contend, that it will be possible, while this commerce shall continue, to apply or to devise a remedy for these evils; to raise the
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Africans in the scale of civilization ; or by erecting on their shores the standard of the Gospel, to make some compensation for the innumerable crimes which, at our instigation, they have committed.

It was likewise recognised by the same majority of the House, that the Slave Trade, baneful as its consequences are to the continent on which it is carried on, is attended with effects so pernicious to this country, as even, in some respects, to bear a comparison with the former. The annual death of more than one fifth of the seamen employed in the slave ships, and the subsequent diminution, through diseases contracted, and injurious treatment sustained in the Slave Trade, of the remainder of the crews during their voyage to the West Indies, and after their arrival there ; a diminution so great, that, on any average, not more than one half of the original number of sailors is found to return home : these were facts confessed to have been proved by evidence in itself incontrovertible, and furnished by the very enemies of the abolition ; and confessed to be in the highest degree alarming to a people trusting
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in its marine, not for commercial pre-eminence alone, not merely for distinguished rank in the catalogue of nations, but for liberty and independence. Nor did it escape the vigilant eye of the Legislature, attentive to the real interests of that mercantile policy, so worthy of being pursued by a maritime power in every channel through which Humanity and Justice lead the way; that by the Slave Trade Great Britain is effectually precluded from establishing an extensive intercourse with the various kingdoms of Africa for the purpose of obtaining the many valuable productions with which those regions abound; an intercourse capable of being carried on without exposing our seamen to uncommon hardships and mortality, or counteracting the natural tendency of commerce to augment our marine; an intercourse offering to our manufacturers and artificers numberless raw materials of the highest value, and opening a new and continually increasing market for the exports of this country; and, above all, an intercourse in which industry may count her gains without blushing at the manner in which she has accumulated them,

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and shuddering to behold them contaminated with blood.

Further; the House of Commons was constrained to yield its reluctant assent to a truth far more grating to the feelings of a British Parliament, far more humiliating to the character of the British Nation, than the obstruction of commercial enterprise, and all the consequent impediments to the sale of our manufactures, to the enlargement of our revenue, and to the increase of our naval strength. It was constrained to admit, with shame and indignation, that the customary effect of the Slave Trade is to produce in the hearts of British captains the extinction not of British generosity, not of common benevolence, but the extinction of almost every feeling which distinguishes the man from the wild beast. By examples, too many to be enumerated, and too shocking to be repeated, the House was constrained to admit that no savage of America ever displayed more implacable malevolence, more refined and ingenious cruelty, in tormenting his prisoner, than British captains have exhibited in the usage of the wretched slaves whom they have

have purchased; and that no tyrant of Persia or of Morocco ever treated his subjects with more unrelenting barbarity, more bitter unkindness, than British slave captains have exercised towards their seamen. I do not mean that every commander of a slave ship was proved to have shewn himself a monster of inhumanity. Some individuals of that description, notwithstanding the depraving nature of their employment, and the contagion of surrounding examples, have manifested much attention to their sailors and much compassion to their slaves. But unfeeling ferocity is, generally speaking, the characteristic of those who are concerned in the Slave Trade. Exclusive of those horrid instances of cruelty to which I have alluded, it is an established fact, that the usual conduct of the persons who are actively engaged in this traffic is in a singular degree brutal and atrocious. Neither the inferior officers nor the common seamen can be exempted from this reproach. But the petrifying influence, which familiarity with scenes of blood and rapine exerts upon the heart, is particularly visible in those who have the principal share in directing them; and who, possessing uncontrolled authority

authority in their respective ships, add fuel to every savage passion by unlimited indulgence.

The same majority of the House was strongly impressed with the conviction, that the existence of the Slave Trade is the radical cause of insurrections in our colonies. That the continued importation of Africans is the source from which revolts of the plantation negroes originate, has long been maintained with unanswerable arguments by the advocates for abolition; and this conclusion was maintained before the House of Commons in the late debate, not merely by the friends of immediate abolition, but by Mr. Dundas himself. No language could be more decided than that which was held by him on this subject. In addition to the irrefragable train of general reasoning by which other Members had already evinced the dangers to be dreaded, as long as the slaves in our islands are exposed to be kindled into revolt by the arrival of their countrymen recently enslaved, and burning with indignation and revenge; he referred, as other speakers had done before him, to the memorable declarations of Mr. Long in his History of Jamaica. On this topic the authority of that

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historian is altogether unquestionable, not only because he had the fullest opportunities of acquiring local information respecting the causes of insurrections among the negroes ; not only because he professedly applied himself to gain all possible intelligence on the subject ; but because his avowed enmity to the suppression of the Slave Trade exempts him from the suspicion of being led by prejudice, or by any other motive than the strong impulse of duty, and the irresistible force of truth, to deliver a testimony, which, were every other argument set aside, would itself be sufficient to convince all impartial men, that this traffic ought instantly to be abolished. Among many other observations, which clearly demonstrate that it is in vain to expect that the islands can enjoy permanent security while the Slave Trade is allowed to subsist, Mr. Long expressly asserts, as the result of his own experience, as the general conclusion to which he was led by accurate and repeated inquiries instituted for the purpose of ascertaining the origin of colonial insurrections, that those insurrections take their rise from the imported Africans, not from the Creole negroes. He further makes it evident in another

bthèr passage; that the rigorous treatment and the legal severities, which the planters deem necessary to be universally exercised towards their slaves; for the purpose of coercing those who, having been lately brought from the coast of Guinea, shew themselves full of turbulence in their dispositions, and unwilling to labour for masters whom they consider as their oppressors; are such as to preclude the great mass of plantation negroes from obtaining that pittance of ease and comfort which, it is allowed, they might otherwise be safely permitted to possess. On these plain grounds, furnished by the writer whom the enemies of the abolition have been accustomed to bring forward as the highest authority in all points affecting the interests of the West Indies, and whose reasoning, even when fatal to their own side of the question, they find it impossible to dispute; it was incontrovertibly proved to the House; that the only safeguard against the most horrible calamity, which the colonies have to dread, is to be sought in the abolition of the Slave Trade: and that no island is secure from ruin, no colonial property safe for a moment, while the entire accomplishment of that measure is delayed. For

what but the total abolition can put a stop to the introduction of those Africans, who, smarting under recent injuries, are continually meditating schemes of revenge; or render it practicable for the planters so to meliorate the condition of their negroes, as to inspire them with sentiments of content and satisfaction, and convince them that they have an interest in the tranquillity of the islands in which they dwell? I have suffered myself to dilate on this branch of my subject somewhat more than I intended; and I have dilated upon it without reluctance: for I feel no common pleasure in the consciousness that all those calumnies, which the enemies of the abolition had heaped upon its friends; all those imputations which had been urged by the former against the latter, branding them as having caused already, or as being likely to cause hereafter, confusion, disturbances, and revolts, in the West Indies, were publicly and effectually done away; and not only that these calumnies and imputations were done away, but that they recoiled on those with whom they had originated; and that the very measure which has been represented with such dishonourable industry as portending speedy
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and complete destruction to our colonies, is evinced to be that measure which alone can ensure them from being sooner or later convulsed by insurrections, laid waste by conflagrations, and deluged with blood.

It appears then, from the preceding statement, that the Slave Trade was generally admitted by that part of the House of Commons which supported the abolition, to derive its supplies from treachery and rapine; to have plunged and to detain the continent of Africa in misery, barbarism, and idolatry; to be the grave of our seamen; to obstruct a very beneficial and honourable extension of our commerce; to harden the hearts and brutalise the dispositions, in a degree scarcely to be described, of by far the greater proportion of Englishmen employed in it; and to be the radical cause of West Indian insurrections, and the grand obstacle to the improvement of the condition of the negroes now in our islands. On all these grounds, not to notice other incidental arguments which pointed to the same conclusion, the Slave Trade was thus recognised by nearly three fourths of the House to be inhuman, unjust, and impolitic.

Were a stranger to hear a simple recital of these concessions, he would without hesitation pronounce that the House, whether it were actuated by motives of conscience or of interest, unquestionably passed a vote before it rose, abolishing the Slave Trade from that moment.

Every man who feels for the honour of the House, for the interests of this country, for the welfare of Africa, and for the cause of humanity, of justice, of morality, and of religion, cannot but deplore from his heart that such a determination was not adopted.

There proved, however, to be a considerable number of the members, and in that number were found two persons not less distinguished for their abilities than respectable from their stations, who, without hesitating to admit the inherent criminality, and the impolicy of the Slave Trade, were yet of opinion that it ought to be abolished, not immediately, but in some gradual manner; and being joined, for reasons which I have already stated, by those who were hostile to abolition in every shape, unfortunately obtained the sanction of the House

House to a resolution conformable to their sentiments.

II. It remains for me to specify, and to examine, the principal arguments urged by those who spoke on that side of the question,

Those arguments may be reduced to two; one purporting to manifest the impracticability, the other to evince the injustice, of immediate abolition.

In the first place it was affirmed that the adoption of measures professedly aiming at nothing further than gradual abolition, was not only the most prudent, but the most effectual, method of attaining the object so generally desired, the final suppression of the Trade. For the cordial assistance and co-operation, it was said, of the colonial legislatures is indispensably requisite to ensure the success of any British acts of Parliament respecting the abolition; and the concurrence of the islands can in no degree whatever be expected, much less their active and hearty exertions, if their prejudices are shocked in the outset by our pe-

remptorily resolving on a total and immediate abolition.

In the next place it was alleged, that, however strongly justice might demand the extinction of this traffic (and that justice did require it they who adduced this argument unequivocally admitted), yet opposite considerations of justice demanded that for some definite time it should be suffered to continue. For the planters, it was represented, had embarked their fortunes in the cultivation of the islands under the approbation and encouragement of the legislature of the mother country; and with a full expectation that they should enjoy without interruption the right which they have ever possessed, a right essential in their opinion to the improvement and preservation of their property, that of recruiting and augmenting their gangs by the purchase of negroes from the coast of Africa. And from these premises it was inferred, that the immediate Abolition of the Slave Trade would be an act of direct injustice.

On the first of these arguments I shall probably

bably not find it necessary to offer many remarks. The assertion on which it entirely rests, that it will not be in the power of the British Parliament to ensure the execution of an act, should it pass an act, for the immediate Abolition of the Slave Trade, without the approbation and effective aid of the colonial assemblies, was scarcely attempted to be in any respect substantiated by those who made it; and was controverted and completely overthrown by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The only way in which any effort had been made in the course of the debate by the friends of gradual Abolition to establish the truth of the assertion which we are considering, was by an indirect intimation, that it would be impracticable for Parliament to prevent the planters from introducing slaves in a clandestine manner into our islands from foreign vessels, and foreign ports in the West Indies; and that the colonists would undoubtedly resort to those methods of obtaining African negroes, were they to be irritated by a sudden Abolition of the Slave Trade.

I shall not, on this occasion, enter into the
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discussion, whether the planters in general, if the Slave Trade were immediately suppressed, would find themselves in want of recruits for their gangs. That in the common course of things they would not feel any such want, unless, contrary to the most evident principles of interest, they should bring it upon themselves by some extravagant and unaccountable misconduct of their own, is a point which, in my judgment, has been thoroughly proved. Nor shall I enquire into the probability of their endeavouring to supply their deficiencies, and even to enlarge their original numbers, by smuggling. I shall admit, for the sake of argument, that they would wish to do both. But with regard to the practicability of thus introducing African negroes in the face of a British act of parliament, and in opposition to the will of this country, I confess that the reasoning of Mr. Pitt, corroborated as it is by a reference to such regulations as Great Britain has an undoubted right to establish in the West Indies, has impressed my mind with a decided conviction that such attempts on the part of the colonists would be altogether ineffectual. I do not mean to affirm, nor did Mr. Pitt contend,

tend, that it might not be possible now and then to evade the most rigid law, however vigilantly executed ; and by stealth to gratify, in a few detached instances, that hankering after negroes iniquitously stolen and cruelly forced from their native land, which long and unbridled indulgence has naturally produced. But if Great Britain shews herself resolved on the one hand to put an entire stop to the gratification of that inhuman appetite ; and on the other feels conscious that she is possessed, according to the terms of the connection subsisting between herself and the West Indies, of a right to prescribe whatever laws she thinks fit to their commerce, and to enforce, by the appointment of proper officers in their ports, complete obedience to her will ; how is it possible that her will can be resisted ? If Great Britain finds herself able, and no one will deny that she has found herself able, effectually to prevent the introduction of foreign manufactures into the colonies ; can it be impossible, can it be difficult, for her to prevent the introduction of slaves ? If she can successfully prohibit, with a word, the introduction of a bale of cloth, of a chest of tea, of a bag of nails ; can she fail of suc-
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cess when she prohibits the importation of a negro? If she proved herself able completely, and without an effort, to annihilate the introduction of American lumber into the islands, reluctant as the planters were to relinquish that mode of obtaining what they considered, as it were, a necessary of life; are there not additional reasons which render it far more easy for her to annihilate at once the introduction of slaves from Africa, however adverse the colonists may be to an act of parliament for that purpose? For a negro, I believe, I may now venture to affirm it on the confession of slave captains and slave dealers, is a human creature. He has some powers of understanding; he has organs of articulation; he has a language not altogether unintelligible to European ears which have been accustomed to it. He is not, like a piece of lumber, unable to give any account how he came into the island; he is not, like a piece of lumber, cut to pieces and worked up into some other shape; mangled though he may be, he preserves some traces of the human form; his purchaser is desirous that he should live, at least for some time; he is capable of telling his story; and though the colour of his skin
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may very fitly prevent any white man from believing him, he is capable of being identified, he is capable of being put to the test by a reference to public registers, and other documents, by which the slaves possessed previous to the Abolition, together with Creole slaves born after it, may be precisely ascertained; he is capable of being questioned by public officers, who may be appointed regularly to inspect the plantations, and examine the negroes; he is capable of being declared free, if he is found to have been fraudulently procured; and his owner is capable of being punished for having fraudulently procured him.

To what I have said on this branch of the subject I will only add, that the plan by which Mr. Dundas proposed to accomplish the gradual suppression of the Slave Trade, the great outlines of which he traced in his speech, appeared to be clogged with extreme difficulties, which were very ably pointed out by Mr. Fox. And one of its leading features, the emancipation of all the children of the negroes after they shall have attained a certain age, was surely of such a nature as
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to shock the prejudices, and alarm the self-interested feelings of the planters, even far more than the immediate Abolition of the Slave Trade. I have, in truth, no conception that any thing, which can fairly be termed the abolition of this detestable traffic, will ever be effected by any plan, the success of which is to depend on the co-operation of the colonial legislatures. For, whatever regulations those assemblies might think it prudent to sanction by their statutes, for the purpose of weathering the present storm, and giving time for the spirit of humanity and justice, now at work in Great Britain, to evaporate; with what shadow of reason can we hope that they would cordially superintend the execution of them, and zealously exert themselves for the attainment of the benefits proposed: knowing, as they would from the first, that the reward of their zeal, the result of the attainment of those benefits, was avowedly to be the Abolition of the Slave Trade; a measure which, whether immediate or gradual, they denounce as inevitably ruinous to the West Indies, and resist with such bigotted and acrimonious perseverance? Encouraged by having once obtained from
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the British Legislature a license for this bloody traffic for a specified term, they would silently wait, neither openly counteracting, nor yet carrying into actual effect, the internal regulations which they had been constrained to enact, but could not be compelled to execute; and purposing, when the term should be nearly expired, to apply again and again to Parliament for prolongations of it. They would be conscious, that at any future time they should be able to make out at least as plausible a case as at present; perhaps, by availing themselves of contingences, one somewhat more plausible. And they would trust, that by seizing the moments when the situation of public affairs may render the political assistance of the planters of more than common value to the minister of the day, they might obtain repeated extensions of their period of rapine; though it would have been in vain to hope, that, if once an act had passed for immediate abolition, its repeal could have been extorted. And thus, by always holding out the prospect of a speedy termination of the trade, they might lull the people of England into supineness, and continue to purchase the wretched Africans for ever.

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Let us now consider the other argument adduced by the friends of gradual abolition.

This argument, my reader may recollect, was in substance, that justice, although it is confessedly violated by the continuance of the Slave Trade, would likewise be violated by the immediate suppression of it; since the faith which Parliament, it was said, has pledged to the colonists, would, in that case, be broken.

Mr. Dundas, in the course of his speech, certainly alleged what approached very nearly to this reasoning; perhaps what entirely amounted to it. But there was another gentleman, who stated it, to my ears at least, in plainer and more pointed language, who, after adopting the emphatical expression of a member who had spoken before, that “the Slave Trade is not a trade, but a crime;” and after recognising, on the one hand, the claims of justice for its abolition, refused to concur in immediately satisfying them, because, in his opinion, there were “opposing claims of justice on the other.”

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In this age of liberal discussion we may examine with unreserved freedom an argument delivered in a public assembly, without being suspected of failing in personal respect towards those who adduced it. Let us then consider what this argument implies.

It implies a direct and palpable contradiction. It implies an impossibility no less extravagant (if impossibilities may admit of comparison) than for the same identical form to be at once round and square; for the same particle of water to be at once in a state of thawing and of congelation. It is saying that justice may be unjust; that an act of absolute duty may be a flagrant crime. For what is it that the argument affirms? Not that justice will hereafter, and under certain future contingences, demand the Abolition of the Slave Trade; but that it does now and under present circumstances demand it. And what does the argument deny? It denies that it is just to abolish the trade until some years shall have elapsed, and certain changes shall have taken place in the situation of the planters.

How then are we to rectify these glaring
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inconsistencies, these jarring and irreconcilable conclusions? By taking up the matter a little higher, and attaining clear ideas of the true nature of justice, and of its bearings on the question before us. Without encumbering ourselves with the formalities of logical definitions, we may state justice to consist in refraining from invading the rights of others. Justice then, it is said, demands the Abolition of the Slave Trade, because it prohibits the invasion of the rights of the Africans, by which alone the Slave Trade subsists. This position is granted by all the friends of Abolition, whether immediate or gradual. And justice, adds the one party, since it prohibits such invasion universally and at all times, requires the immediate Abolition. Take a larger view of the subject, replies the other; does not justice prohibit the invasion of the rights of the West Indians? Unquestionably. And is not the faith of Parliament pledged that no great change of system shall be enforced on them from which their property may receive an essential injury? And consequently does not justice, conclude the supporters of Abolition, require that property to
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be secured from material detriment by a limited permission of the Slave Trade ?

Such is the detailed state of the question.

Now I conceive, that no gradual abolitionist, nor even any the most prejudiced planter, whatever language he might hold when talking inaccurately of the pledged faith of Parliament, would contend, when pressed closely on the subject, that the Legislature has bound itself for ever to support the Slave Trade for the purpose of securing West Indian property. He would undoubtedly explain his meaning to be this : that the Legislature stands engaged, either to let the Slave Trade continue, or to give a full compensation for any detriment incurred by its Abolition.

For the present I will suppose, what I by no means intend permanently to concede, that a pledge, thus explained, has been given to the planters by the British Parliament.

How then are the claims of justice on behalf of the planter to be satisfied ? By violat-

ing her claims on behalf of the African? That is impossible. Justice cannot at once give to the African a right to be free, and to the slave captain, or his emissary, a right to enslave him. The claims of justice, it is an important truth, and let us remember it, cannot oppose each other. Every claim which the sanctions attaches to some appropriate object. The claim which she gives to the West Indian is not on the African, who is free; but on the Parliament of Great Britain, which, according to our present supposition, is bound. The planter has no plea to invade the liberty of the one, fully as he may be entitled to exact payment from the other. The African has incurred no debt; he was no party to the contract; he has not put himself into the hands of the British Legislature; he has not engaged to ratify its bargains with its colonists; he has not pledged himself to surrender at the beck of a Guinea captain; to abandon his country, his friends, and his kindred; to pine in fetters and misery in the hold of a slave ship; to be trucked and bartered for money; to expend his strength for strangers; to bleed at the will of a master; to groan under the whip of a merciless driver; to endure the

taunts, the ignominy, and the oppression, which fall to the lot of hopeless captivity; and to deliver all his posterity into bondage for ever. Let those discharge debts who contract them. England, it may be, had rather pay her creditors with African blood, than with her own gold. And this her Senators tell her is justice,

But I must now recall that concession which, for the purpose of giving every advantage to the argument which I have been combating, I have hitherto made. I deny altogether that the West Indian planters (with the exception of some proprietors of lands in the ceded islands, whose case rests on grounds peculiar to itself, and not undeserving of further inquiry) will have any just claim to compensation from this country, if the Slave Trade shall be instantly abolished. For several reasons, two only of which I will mention, I deny that they will have any such claim. In the first place, I think it apparent, from the evidence laid before the House of Commons, that the number of births among the negroes is now greater than that of the deaths; and that the immediate Abolition

would contribute, in various ways therein specified, to the general benefit of the proprietors of the islands. And, in the next place, it was completely established in the late debate by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, after he had described the important advantages which would accrue to the West Indies from the immediate Abolition, that no pledge whatever has at any time been given by the British Parliament, either that the Slave Trade should not be suppressed, or that the losses incurred in consequence of its suppression, had any losses been likely to take place, should be made good by the public. I will not injure his arguments, which were not only founded on general reasoning, but confirmed by a reference to particular statutes, by attempting a detail of them. I trust that they will be laid before the world with sufficient correctness in some of the promised Reports of the Debate; and shall content myself with adding, that to my mind they were perfectly conclusive.

I should hope that no person who had an opportunity of hearing the reasoning of Mr. Pitt on the subject of compensation, can still

have a doubt remaining as to the groundlessness of all claims on the public, except, perhaps, with regard to the ceded islands, which planters may bring forward. But I will not allow myself to apprehend, that any individual whatever who shall seriously put the matter home to his conscience, can fail of convincing himself that the claims of the West Indians to compensation, had they been founded in truth and justice, could not have vindicated the continuance of the Slave Trade for a moment.

I would now therefore address myself to all who have hitherto been disposed to gradual rather than to immediate Abolition ; and, were it not that it might be construed into an appearance of presumption, I would particularly request the candid attention of those members of the House of Commons, if any such should honour these pages with a perusal, who on the late discussion gave their suffrages for the former measure in opposition to the latter. Thinking, as unquestionably I do, that the continuance of the Slave Trade for another hour can be justified on no ground of policy or of reason ; thinking that its con-

tinuance is a direct violation of the principles of justice and of the most sacred obligations of Christianity; I give to all who voted for a limited prolongation of its existence full credit for the purity of the motives by which they were actuated. And with respect to that gentleman, to whose expressions I have had occasion more particularly to allude, when endeavouring to refute the argument, that “opposing claims of justice” forbade the immediate Abolition; I feel it my duty to declare, little as he can be concerned as to the opinion entertained of him by a stranger, that I have ever been accustomed to regard his character with respect and admiration; and that I still regard it with respect and admiration, deeply as I lament that the measure which he supported should have received, even for a single instant, the countenance of such talents and of such virtues.

I should offer an injury to the parliamentary friends of gradual Abolition, were I to represent them as having favoured that plan on any other grounds than the two general arguments which I have stated. I should offer them an injury were I to suppose that
they

they were of that description of men, who caring little, and knowing less, respecting momentous questions on which they are called to decide, are always ready to adopt some half-measure, something intermediate between right and wrong, and applaud themselves for being persons of moderation. I should offer them an injury were I to intimate, that they had been led by confused expectations of some national benefit to be attained by the Slave Trade, of some public or private evils to be dreaded from the subversion of a long established system (delusive as all such expectations, visionary as all such fears would have been), to make a compromise between God and mammon *, and after admitting

* I cannot refrain from making a few short remarks in this place, although they are not required by my present line of argument, on the blind ignorance, not to say the bold impiety, of those who have presumed to assert, that the Scriptures sanction the Slave Trade. That the Scriptures permit the existence, under certain circumstances, of the state of Slavery; and that the Supreme Being promulgated laws to the Jews respecting the proper mode of treating those who, for their crimes, by their own consent, or for debt, had been brought into it, I readily allow. But if any man will yet dare to affirm, that, in plain contradiction

mitting what is due to the former, resolve to postpone the discharge of the obligation till it should suit the convenience of the latter. I admit them to have pursued a course which they believed at the time to have been the line of duty ; and I admit that they pursued it for one or both of the reasons already mentioned, namely, that proceeding in the way

dictation to the acknowledged attributes of the Deity, any sanction is given in the Old Testament to those who reduce men to slavery by force or fraud, let him blush when he reads the following lines : “ He that stealeth a man and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death.” Exod. xxi. 16. I hope ere long to see a British Act of Parliament enact the same penalty for the same crime ; and not forget those who either in Africa or the West Indies shall buy men who have been stolen. Again : “ If a man be found stealing any of his brethren of the children of Israel, and maketh merchandise of him, or selleth him, then that thief shall die ; and thou shalt put away evil from among you.” Deut. xxiv. 7. This latter passage only relates to the stealing or selling of a Jew by a brother Jew. But Christ, we know, has commanded us to consider and treat all mankind as our brethren.

If any one ask what particular light the New Testament throws on the Slave Trade, in addition to the conclusions to be drawn from its general precepts, he may consult the ninth and tenth verses of the first chapter of the first Epistle to Timothy, and observe the description of persons with whom “ manstealers” are classed by St. Paul.

of

of gradual Abolition would be the most practicable, perhaps the only practicable, method of extinguishing the Slave Trade; and that considerations of justice due to the West Indians, render it morally wrong to abolish it at once. But if on reflection they discover both these reasons to be erroneous; if they become convinced that the immediate Abolition of the trade is the only sure method of abolishing it at all; and is the only measure which justice and religion permit conscientious men to adopt; if they feel themselves bound in duty to God and man to quit a dangerous and polluted path, which, on entering it they conceived would lead to the dwelling of mercy, of equity, and of happiness; but which they now behold pointing at once to fraud and rapine, to anguish and murder, to every thing that is atrociously and incurably iniquitous; they have the comfort of reflecting, that it is not yet too late to recede. They have the comfort to reflect that the rights, which the wisdom of our constitution confers on members of the House of Commons, ensure to each individual, who possesses a seat among the representatives of the people, an opportunity of re-considering
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his conduct and the grounds of it ; of rectifying his misconceptions ; and even if he finds that he has inadvertently been led into fundamental errors, either with respect to supporting or to resisting any measure proposed, of throwing the weight of his suffrage and of his exertions into that scale which he now perceives to be stamped with the characters of justice. Great is the praise which belongs to men, who, acting under the impulse of upright intentions, are fortunate enough to embrace at first the proper course. Yet greater praise is due to those, who, influenced by motives equally pure, but unconsciously mistaking the direction in which they ought to have proceeded, have the understanding to discern, and the magnanimity to correct their error ; and triumphing over the artifices of the self-interested, who are solicitous to detain them in it, and strive to alarm them by the prospect of the tremendous charge of inconsistency, do not hesitate to avow, that the consistency at which a good man ought to aim, is the being consistent in always doing what he believes to be his duty ; and that having endeavoured to keep their minds still open to argument and conviction,

viction, they have discovered that they were less wise yesterday than they are to-day.

If ever there was an occasion, when those, who have given a vote on which they reflect with concern, are particularly called upon by every moral consideration to prevent by a timely and effectual remedy the consequences to be dreaded, it is the present. Let them place before their eyes the enormity of the evil in question. Let them consider (I speak on a supposition which I am unwilling to think possible, that the House of Lords too should be of opinion, that the laws of God may be suspended by an act of Parliament, and that some duration, however limited, should be granted to the Slave Trade) how many thousands and tens of thousands of their fellow-creatures, from whom they have received no injury, who have committed no crime, they will have contributed to plunge in a complication of the greatest of human calamities. Let them also reflect on the additional multitudes, which from past experience we may expect to be wounded, slaughtered, or rendered miserable for life in those scenes of war, treachery, and outrage, by
means

means of which our slave ships are to be filled. During the continuation of the term, should a term be granted, the eagerness of the planters to buy slaves, and the consequent increase of price, together with the apprehension of a speedy period being put to their execrable traffic, will stimulate the brutal avarice of the slave-takers to tenfold exertions, and increase in an equal proportion the devastation and miseries of Africa. “Wo to the inhabitants of the earth; for the Devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, *because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.*” Well may these words of holy writ be applied to that devoted land! But supposing the term to be extremely short, to be one or two years; supposing too that it would be possible to limit the number of wretched beings to be seized in Africa, and exported to the West Indies; supposing that only ten thousand more of our fellow-creatures were to be received on board our slave ships; I earnestly beg every member of the Legislature to pause for a moment, and before he gives his assent to a Bill for that purpose, to make the case of one of those ten thousand Negroes, whose liberty and happiness he is called upon

to

to vote away in cold blood, fairly and impartially his own. Let him do as he would be done by. Let him collect together all the reasons for assenting to that bill which others have produced, and add to them all which his own ingenuity can suggest. Let him ask himself; and let him answer himself truly, for much is at stake; whether, if he were that Negro, he should think those reasons justified his being enslaved. Let him ask himself, whether they would justify the enslaving of that Negro, if pleaded before an unprejudiced court of justice; let him ask himself whether they will justify it at that tribunal, before which he and that Negro will shortly stand face to face.

What may we not expect from the virtue of individuals, when so generous and laudable an ardour pervades the people at large? It is indeed an ardour which does not disgrace the cause in which it is displayed. Whatever feeble efforts may have been made to cast reflections on a few of the Petitions presented to Parliament; it is impossible for any reasonable man to deny, that the inhabitants of Great Britain, while they have performed the
duty

duty which they owe to the Constitution, by applying to the House of Commons in that temperate and respectful manner, in which every branch of the Legislature ought to be addressed; have manifested their detestation of the Slave Trade with a nearer approach to unanimity, with more decided conviction; and, I may add, with more knowledge of the subject in question, than was ever experienced before. It is an ardour which I trust will never subside, until this traffic is utterly extinguished. While the serpent has life there is danger. It may appear to have received a fatal wound; but if it be not speedily crushed to pieces, it may prolong year after year its baneful existence, and at length revive in all its wonted horrors. No circumstance is so likely to prevent the Slave Trade from being abolished, as for the country to imagine that it is in fact abolished already. If opposed with active and persevering exertions, it will be annihilated: if despised and neglected, it will secretly resume its strength. Imitating the example already given in Parliament by Mr. Wilberforce and his associates, I trust the people of Great Britain will wash their hands from having any concern in bringing in a Bill
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for *gradual* Abolition. I trust that, beholding with abhorrence a Bill giving a *licence* for the practice of treachery, and for the commission of murder, for the diffusion of the greatest miseries, and for the perpetration of the blackest crimes, they will refuse to partake in the guilt; and will not be beguiled, by the passing of such a Bill, to enter into any truce or parley with iniquity. I trust that, without delay or intermission, they will adopt every lawful method, public or private, for cutting short the term of rapine and devastation in its course; and never lay down their constitutional arms, until the enemy be completely destroyed.

T H E E N D,

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